



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Grand Junction Rail-with-Trail Feasibility Study examines the potential alignments for creating a non-motorized trail along a historic rail corridor in Cambridge, Massachusetts while maintaining the current rail operations and accommodating proposed Urban Ring transit facilities. The purpose of this study is to build upon earlier studies and provide the preliminary foundation needed to plan, design, and construct the trail. This study examines the benefits of the project, summarizes the existing conditions along the corridor, describes and evaluates alignment options, provides information regarding design and phasing of the trail, and touches upon management of the trail corridor.

The use of the Grand Junction corridor as a linear path was envisioned by the 2000 Cambridge Green Ribbon Open Space Committee in its study of possible new parks and open space in the city and was identified as a top priority. The 2001 Eastern Cambridge Planning Study (ECAPS) also recommended the creation of the path along the Grand Junction corridor as an infrastructure project to enhance non-auto mobility. These two processes identified the opportunity for creating a linear open space in the neighborhoods' extensive new development in Eastern Cambridge, through which the railroad corridor passes, as a major benefit of creating a trail, since these areas do not currently have extensive open space opportunities.

The Grand Junction Rail-with-Trail (RWT) would create a major north-south bicycle and pedestrian linkage between Boston, the MIT campus, several dense Cambridge neighborhoods and Somerville. By providing a vital urban component to the existing network of parkland-based trails, the trail would do much to encourage bicycling and walking to and from the area's major employment and university centers.

The Grand Junction RWT would also serve to highlight portions of Cambridge's industrial history by providing new public access to the old rail corridor. The trail's route from parklands, through the old manufacturing corridor, to residential neighborhoods – all in only two miles – would provide an interesting and unique experience to trail users.

Trail Alignment and Design Features

- The trail alignment would follow the right-of-way of the historic rail corridor. There are two potential options, one which incorporates the latest plans for the Urban Ring, and the other which could happen should the Urban Ring not be developed on the surface along the Grand Junction. Without the Urban Ring, the trail would be aligned along primarily along the western edge of the corridor, with some sections on the east. Where the Urban Ring is proposed for the surface, the preferred cross-section within the corridor has the trail on the western most edge, the Bus Rapid Transit in the middle, and the existing rail line to the east.
- A 12-foot-wide (optimum width) trail with an asphalt surface and soft shoulders would accommodate a wide variety of non-motorized uses including pedestrian, recreational and commuting bicyclists, wheelchairs, in-line skaters and others. In constricted areas, the trail may need to narrow to 10 feet wide.
- Development of potential trailheads and pedestrian access points would provide good access for local and region-wide trail users.
- The trail would provide connections to community facilities and neighborhoods.
- Intersection improvements would ensure safe trail crossings at existing roads.
- Directional and regulatory signage would help orient trail users and inform them about trail etiquette.
- Safety and security features include lighting and good definition between the trail and adjacent neighbors.
- Design features would maximize the trail's aesthetic and functional qualities.

Next Steps

1. Work with property owners to ensure that new development does not preclude the future creation of the trail.
2. Pursue the creation of a Pathway Overlay District along the Grand Junction corridor to protect the future use of the corridor as a multi-use path.
3. Participate in the Urban Ring planning process to ensure that proposed alignments permit the creation of the trail.
4. Work with CSX and MIT to create strategies for ensuring that their operational needs are met in the planning of a trail.
5. Investigate funding opportunities for creating the path, in a phased approach, or as a whole should an opportunity become available.